

## Guide in the Wilderness

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Summary: Kaoru accidentally kills a man in a fight, and Kenshin tries to help her recover. Now chapterized and new chapter added  
(2/9/01)

### 1. Chapter 1

Guide in the Wilderness

>by David A. Tatum<br>

>Disclaimer: Rurouni Kenshin belongs to Nobuhiro Watsuki. I'm only<br>borrowing from his excellent work.

><br>Notes: Well, I finally saw all twenty-five volumes of the anime (seeing it

>has actually caused some additions to this fanfic I was not planning on). <br>I've also read Maigo-chan's translations, but they don't go QUITE as far as

>the anime does. Since I haven't read past that, I can't set it past that,<br>so... consider this an anime continuation, and, er, disregard the manga...

>Oh, and I'm not used to using honorifics in my fanfics, but for some<br>reason, the only other real option I think would work (which has Kenshin

>calling Kaoru 'Miss Kaoru') doesn't appeal to me, so I'll try using them<br>here- let me know if I blunder them totally... Anyway, enough of this

>note, here goes the story. Enjoy...<br>-----

><br>Chapter 1

><br>'Where's Sanosuke when we need him?' Kaoru thought desperately. A knife

>was pinning Yahiko's shirt to the wall with a struggling Yahiko in it, she<br>was being held in place by a brutish giant, and Kenshin, worn out from a

>battle he had just returned from, was facing off against another rogue<br>hitokiri. Sanosuke had yet to come home from a lunch at the Akabeko and

>Misao was back in Osaka, so there was no help in the immediate vicinity to<br>come to their aid, so it was up to them.

><br>The flat of the attacker's blade crashed down onto a weary Kenshin's head,  
>dropping him to the ground like a sack of rice. The sakaba sword clattered<br>to the floor and slid across the smoothly-polished wood.

><br>"No!" Kaoru screamed, as the hitokiri raised his katana, ready to deliver  
>the blow that would separate the half-conscious Kenshin's head from his<br>shoulders. She struggled to break free and stop him, even if it meant she  
>would take the death blow, but the man holding her picked her up and put<br>her over his shoulder in order to pin her better.  
><br>She couldn't escape his grip, but the adjustment to her position did free  
>up one of her arms. She reached out looking for any kind of weapon, and<br>found some kind of polearm one of the hitokiri's entourage was holding.  
>She tore it from his grasp, and without being able to see anything and in<br>too much of a hurry to look anyway, swung wildly, hoping to distract the  
>killer and perhaps give Kenshin a few more seconds to recover and defend<br>himself. She felt something connect hard and heard a meaty 'thwack.'  
><br>Kaoru went tumbling to the floor much like Kenshin had moments before when  
>her captor dropped her, shocked. A collective gasp from the hitokiri's<br>followers went unnoticed by her and she rolled to her feet and wielded the  
>polearm in a more defensive and controlled manner. A small drop of<br>something fell on her hand.  
><br>Kaoru's eyes shifted, preparing her for a sudden attack. None came- in  
>fact, most of the people were looking at her with abject horror- even<br>Yahiko. It wasn't until Kenshin spoke that she began to wonder why.  
><br>"K-kaoru... what have you done?" he asked, his voice trembling.

><br>Kaoru looked at Kenshin, then at the hitokiri. Make that the now deceased  
>hitokiri, who had a serious wound on his head. She raised her eyes,<br>looking at the messy blade of the poleax she was wielding. Finally, she  
>glanced at the small drop on her hand, which had been un-noticed by her<br>until just then.  
><br>The tiny red pool the drop of blood had made drew Kaoru in as she realized  
>what, exactly, she had done. As the weight of it all impacted on her, she<br>screamed, and then blacked out.  
><br>\* \* \* \* \*  
><br>Kaoru woke up to two loudly bickering voices. It took her a moment to  
>clear her head and understand what they were saying, but when she did what<br>she heard made her decide it probably wasn't a good idea to be waking up  
>right then.<br>>"...r over to me," Saitoh was demanding. Saitoh? Wasn't he killed in that<br>explosion at Shishio's stronghold?  
><br>"Dammit, Saitoh!" Kenshin cursed- not something Kaoru usually liked to hear  
>him say. "You KNOW that what happened was not her fault- I was about

to be<br>killed, she was being held in mid-air by that giant oaf, she was swinging  
>wildly, and she couldn't even see that she was holding a poleax at the<br>time! She never meant to kill the guy- just to buy me some time to recover  
>and prepare for his next attack!"<br>  
>'Oh, god,' Kaoru thought, her mind suddenly snapping all of the sleepiness<br>out of her system. 'It wasn't a dream- I really did k-kill him... but my  
>father's teachings, my philosophy- why? Why was I not able to control<br>myself better? Maybe I was in a desperate situation, but I should have  
>known from its weight that it was more than just a bo, and swung in such a<br>way to make sure only the flat of the blade would impact him! But I  
>couldn't... I didn't... I failed. I failed to follow my budo- the sword<br>that protects life.... Oh, god...'  
><br>Saitoh nodded gruffly. "Of course I know that- and that's the only reason  
>I haven't killed all of you yet to get to her! Remember, I live by the<br>philosophy of Kill Evil Instantly, and if I thought Kaoru was a real  
>murderer she would be dead already, as would anyone who tried to stop me! <br>But if someone is obviously cut down by a blade, then his death MUST be  
>investigated by the law, and for that reason I must take her down to the<br>station with me for questioning, and so I need her to come with me now."  
><br>"No!" Kenshin screamed. Kaoru could hear his sword sliding in its sheath  
>in preparation for some battou-jutsu technique, and she felt the shifting<br>of Saitou's feet on the floor to indicate that he was moving to his  
>Gattoutsu stance- she knew the battle was about to start, one which<br>(between these two) would lead to one of them being killed and the Battosai  
>likely emerging, but... she couldn't stop it. She'd killed a man- what<br>right did she have to stop someone else from doing the same?  
  
><br>"Stop it, both of you!" Megumi's voice shouted. "You are being as  
>unreasonable as five year olds- no, less. Ayame-chan and Suzame-chan have<br>always been more willing to compromise than the two of you are right now!  
>Kenshin, Saitoh is right! He HAS to bring Kaoru in, or else she won't be<br>able to explain what happened and will be thought of as a murderer!"  
>Saitoh smiled slightly, amused at having been defended by one of Kenshin's<br>friends. "And you, Mr. Policeman, should realize the necessity of allowing  
>Kaoru the time to recover her wits- she's been in a great shock! And you<br>should also allow Kenshin to accompany her, as well- she'll need the moral  
>support-"<br>  
>Saitoh snorted. "Whatever. I'll just wait here until she's ready to<br>travel, then. But don't make me wait too long, or else I won't bother with  
>courtesy anymore, and I'll just sling her over my shoulder and drag her to<br>jail."  
><br>Megumi nodded, satisfied. Turning to the other swordfighter, she

asked,  
>"Ken-san?"<br>  
>"...hai."<br>  
>Kaoru was surprised. Kenshin had seemed to hesitate before agreeing-  
why? <br>The agreement seemed perfectly reasonable to her. In fact,  
she didn't see  
>the need for an agreement. She'd killed a man- she didn't deserve  
time to<br>recover. She didn't deserve to have Kenshin stay with her  
any more.  
><br>"Good. Now, let me return to my patient, and when I think she's  
ready to  
>see the two of you, I'll let you know. Now, get out of here!" the  
female<br>doctor ordered. A shuffling of feet indicated the two had  
left, and soon  
>Megumi was back by Kaoru, and a cold wet cloth was placed on her  
head. <br>Still, Kaoru did and said nothing.  
><br>After a moment, Megumi clucked. "You know, I really don't like  
treating  
>people who only pretend to be sick."<br>  
>Kaoru's eyes opened and she sat up. "Then why don't you leave?"<br>

>Megumi smirked. "I'm not going to answer that just yet. First, I  
think<br>you need to be caught up on the news. It seems our Saitoh  
was only  
>pretending to be dead to us, but when he heard you had killed a man  
he<br>rushed right over. To gloat about it to Ken-san, I suppose."

><br>"Gloat?"  
><br>"Saitoh has always said that Kenshin was an idealist. You, as it  
turns  
>out, were that ideal."<br>  
>"Ideal?" Kaoru asked.<br>  
>"The sword which fought for what it believed in, protected those it  
cared<br>about, and never had to take a life. Your philosophy, in  
other words- and  
>your ability to keep it."<br>  
>Kaoru sobbed. "Until now. I've ruined Kenshin's ideal, I've  
failed<br>myself, and I've killed a man- what do I have to live for?"  
She closed her  
>eyes again, laying back down. "I should just kill myself right now,  
before<br>I mess up anyone else's life."  
><br>The stinging sensation of Megumi's slap forced Kaoru's eyes back  
open.  
>"Snap out of it!" the female doctor snarled. "You killed a man, yes,  
but<br>in doing so you saved Ken-san's life! It would all be for  
nothing, though,  
>if you were to kill yourself. You may have ruined Kenshin's ideal,  
but as<br>long as you live he will go on with his own life. If you  
were to die,  
>though, he would become a shell of what he is... or may even follow  
you in<br>death."  
><br>"But-"  
><br>"Don't 'but' me! If anything, you can give Ken-san a new ideal-  
a person  
>who was once forced to kill, but resists the urge to kill again. And  
if<br>you kill yourself, you WILL be killing someone else."

><br>Kaoru sighed. "Okay... for Kenshin's sake, I won't kill  
myself...."  
><br>Megumi frowned. "With that attitude, you'll start feeling

suicidal the  
>next time you and he have an argument. You have to live not JUST for him,<br>but for yourself, as well. And Sano, and Yahiko-chan, and Ayame-chan, and  
>Sazumi-chan, and Tae-san, and Tsubasa-chan, and Misao-chan, and... and me! <br>Dammit, you're my friend, too! Live for yourself and live for us, because  
>no-one here wants to see you die! Not even Saitoh- if he did, he would<br>have killed you already."  
><br>Timidly, Kaoru nodded. "Alright, Megumi-san. For myself, and you, and  
>Kenshin...."<br>  
>Megumi smiled. "Good. Now, get some rest... when you wake up next time,<br>I'll let Ken-san know you're awake, and you and he can go meet Saitoh and  
>get everything cleared up...."<br>  
>\* \* \* \* \*<br>  
>"Kaoru, Are you sure you're feeling up to this?" Kenshin asked, concerned. <br>"We can always hold off for another day or two..."  
  
><br>'No,' Kaoru thought. 'I will not delay whatever punishment I deserve for  
>killing that man. I deserve it...' She paused for a moment. 'And why<br>isn't he calling me 'Kaoru-DONO any more?'  
><br>"I'm fine, Kenshin," she said. "I want to get this out of the way."  
><br>Kenshin nodded. "Don't worry- I won't let anyone to do anything to you for  
>this."<br>  
>"No!" Kaoru shouted. "Don't you DARE make that promise!"<br>  
  
>Kenshin jumped back, startled. "Oro?! What did I say?"<br>  
>Kaoru blinked- she hadn't meant to sound so angry. "I'm sorry, Kenshin- I<br>didn't mean to shout. But I really killed that man, so I deserve whatever  
>punishment the law sets down for me. Don't get into a fight trying to<br>prevent me from getting what I deserve."  
><br>"But I..." Kenshin began. A stern glare from Kaoru stopped him. "Okay-  
>but ONLY if the sentence is a just one. You know that they've gotten<br>carried away in the past."  
><br>Kaoru sighed. She really couldn't expect more from him- he would always be  
>her protector, she supposed. Even if she didn't deserve him any more.<br>  
>"We're here," Kenshin said after a few minutes of walking. "Ready?"<br>  
>"Yes," Kaoru said, and started into the building without looking at him.<br>  
>Saitoh met them at the door. "Ah, good. You're here. About time, too. <br>Come on..."  
><br>He led them to a small office, and gestured for them to sit down. "Okay,  
>Kaoru, all I need is for you to confirm the report. According to what<br>we've heard from Yahiko and the Battosai over there, the hitokiri Gantarou  
>Itoko came into your dojo and challenged Kenshin to a duel. You and Yahiko<br>were detained, and while struggling you grabbed a poleax. You swung the  
>poleax wildly, and wound up killing Itoko with it. Correct?"<br>

>Kaoru nodded. "Hai... that's exactly what I did. Killed Itoko..."<br>  
>Something flashed in Saitoh's eyes at the hopeless tone in Kaoru's voice. <br>Frowning, he nodded. "Good. As it turns out, Gantarou Itoko was wanted by  
>us for having killed several regional leaders. Good job! Now, get out of<br>here and go home...."  
><br>Kaoru blinked. "But... what about my sentence? I killed a man- shouldn't  
>I be imprisoned, or... or something?"<br>  
>Saitoh laughed. "If everyone who killed a man was imprisoned, then<br>Kenshin, Aoshi, and probably Sano and Misao would likely be in jail right  
>now... and we would have just executed Shishio Makoto's gang in quiet<br>instead of giving them the jobs we did. And you were acting in  
>self-defense, after all...."<br>  
>"Um... okay," Kaoru said, sounding somewhat disappointed. "Come on,<br>Kenshin, let's go home."  
><br>She turned to go, and a VERY relieved Kenshin started to follow.

><br>"One moment, Battosai- I'd like to talk with you in private for a moment."  
><br>"Oro?" Kenshin said. Kaoru shut the door behind her and walked to the  
>front of the police station, and started to wait for him.<br>

>"Battosai," Saitoh said. "Just a suggestion- you might want to start<br>wandering again. And I mean now."  
><br>Kenshin's eyes widened. "But... I can't leave Kaoru alone- especially at a  
>time like this!"<br>  
>"Who said you had to leave her alone?" A completely baffled look answered<br>him. "I meant you should go... and take her with you. It took you a  
>decade of wandering to finally get over what you did in Kyoto. Kaoru's<br>only killed once, so it shouldn't take so long... and if you bring her with  
>you, then maybe that time will be reduced."<br>  
>"Saitoh?"<br>  
>"Look, I don't like you- I think you know that," Saitoh growled. "But I'm<br>a man, just like you. I know what it's like when your woman suddenly gets  
>depressed- I AM married, after all. If Tokio were acting like Kaoru is<br>now, I'd damn well do something."  
><br>"This isn't like you, Saitoh," Kenshin said suspiciously. "What's in it  
>for you?"<br>  
>"You need a reason? Very well.... We haven't needed you for a while now-<br>we probably won't for some time, still. However, until you can get Kaoru  
>feeling better, I'm pretty sure we won't be able to bring you back into our<br>service if we need you."  
><br>Kenshin nodded. He expected the reason to be something like that. "Well,  
>if that's so, then I'd like something from you...."<br>  
>Saitoh blinked. "From me?"<br>

>-----  
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## 2. Chapter 2

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d6d3e6fac363b09c10ea3889dd5670f8  
><br>Chapter 2  
><br>All of their friends had gathered together for a party to help  
send the two  
>of them off on a happier note, but neither Kenshin nor Kaoru were  
too<br>pleased. Kaoru was still upset about what she had done, and  
Kenshin just  
>wanted to get going so he could start working on making Kaoru feel  
better. <br>Both, however, endured the goodbyes without complaint.  
  
><br>The food for the party was catered in by Tae and Tsubame, who  
had decided  
>to shut down the Akebeko for the event, and they brought not just  
their<br>spectacular sukiyaki but also a huge tray of other goodies  
and several  
>bottles of sake.<br>  
>Sanosuke was vehemently avoiding the sake. Usually in the parties  
that he<br>went to, he drunk everyone else under the table, however  
this time he was  
>pretty sure that being drunk was inappropriate. He had missed the  
entire<br>incident, one in which Kenshin and Kaoru had desperately  
needed his help,  
>drunk and passed out on the floor of one of the gambling halls  
he<br>frequented. By the time he'd recovered and showed up at the  
dojo, Kaoru  
>had already been interrogated by Saitoh and Kenshin had already  
decided to<br>take her on this trip. Sano wasn't even around to help  
pick up the pieces-  
>all he could do was to help arrange this party. He was barely able  
to meet<br>Kenshin's eyes at that moment.  
><br>Megumi stood on the other side of the room, looking in mild  
disgust in his  
>direction. She hadn't had a chance to talk to Sanosuke since he  
had<br>returned from the gambling hall, but she certainly had some  
words for him.

>Not right then, though- she didn't want to upset Kaoru or Kenshin any more<br>than they already were.  
><br>Surprisingly, Saitoh had footed part of the bill for repairs needed to the  
>dojo following the fight. Megumi wasn't sure what was going on there, but<br>she didn't like it one bit. However, she wouldn't look a gift horse in the  
>mouth- she knew how bad the financial difficulties were at the Kamiya<br>residence, and she wasn't going to tell Kaoru to not take it. Well,  
>Yahiko, really- he was going to be in charge of the dojo until Kenshin and<br>Kaoru returned, and that included the maintenance and, to a lesser degree,  
>finances. She would help him, of course, as would Tae (who had started<br>giving him a fairly decent salary as a waiter), Tsubame, and (once she got  
>her hands on the damn drunk and told him some things or three) Sanosuke. <br>And Dr. Genzai, Ayame, and Suzame, too, of course.

><br>Yahiko was probably the only one who was having fun at the party. He was  
>going to be trusted on his own- they weren't going to treat him like a<br>child and forced to move in with someone else. True, he didn't entirely  
>like WHY Kaoru and Kenshin were going away, but he was pretty sure that<br>they'd be fine. They tended to keep each other from getting into too much  
>trouble- Kenshin kept Kaoru alive, Kaoru kept Kenshin sane. Well, in this<br>case, it might be the other way around- Kenshin was supposed to keep Kaoru  
>sane, but he was pretty sure neither of them would be in any danger. Ayame<br>and Suzame playing with Dr. Genzai in front of him was also helping to  
>lighten the mood, as well.<br>>There WAS the fear that he might not be able to handle all of the troubles<br>that came from maintaining the dojo- his only source of income was his job  
>at the Akebeko, and while that kept him fed and gave him some pocket<br>change, he doubted it would be enough to pay for any significant amount of  
>supplies, so if anything broke he wouldn't be able to fix it. Well, not<br>unless he relied on his old pickpocketing skills... and he really didn't  
>want to do that again.<br>>Tae served the food to everyone, Tsubame included. She had given the young<br>girl the night off, so that she could be with her friends. Tae, herself,  
>wasn't entirely sure if this trip was that good an idea... then again, it<br>just might be enough to inspire Kenshin to buy Kaoru the ring she so  
>deserved. Tae also wasn't sure about Yahiko- she knew that the small<br>salary she was paying him (which was really more than she could afford)  
>wouldn't be enough for him to support himself for very long. She was<br>fairly sure that Megumi, Sanosuke, and her young charge Tsubame would all  
>help him out (Tsubame probably wouldn't be able to do much, but she could<br>keep him company and stop him from being so lonely... hmm, and that might  
>just be another nice relationship for her to try and help smooth



out-<br>though as young as the couple was, it probably would be difficult to push  
>it very quickly. She'd have to think about it), but it might not be<br>enough. She'd have to keep an eye on him, too, and make sure he ate  
>enough...<br>  
>Saitoh, monitoring what was going on in the party from the shadows, unseen<br>by all (well, by all except Kenshin, but Kenshin wasn't about to complain  
>this time), couldn't believe he'd made that agreement with the Battousai. <br>How could he have been talked into anything so foolish? Or expensive...  
>Tokio was probably going to kill him. Well, maybe- she had a kind enough<br>heart she'd probably tell him he should have done it without the agreement.  
> Whatever, he still couldn't believe he'd made that agreement.<br>

>Tsubame was happy and sad, nervous and shy. Everyone she loved was around<br>her, even Yahiko. True, a couple of those people were about to leave on a  
>journey for an undetermined period of time, but that was the future. The<br>NOW was a happy time. And none were happier than Yahiko, which somehow  
>made her smile that much more. Tae called her over and whispered a few<br>words in her ear. Tsubame had been given the night off, but Tae needed her  
>to do one little thing while she set up for dinner. Tsubame smiled-of<br>course she would help.  
><br>Kaoru was totally accepting of what was happening. She was standing in her  
>place, behind Kenshin, letting him do the talking for her. She didn't know<br>what to say any more- she certainly didn't have any right to give  
>instruction to Yahiko, since she'd defiled the rules of her school. She<br>couldn't say anything to Megumi- there wasn't anything more to say, really.  
> She couldn't say anything to Tae- the other woman would be taking on more<br>than her fair share of responsibilities by helping Yahiko out. She  
>couldn't say anything to Tsubame, Ayame, or Suzame- she didn't want to<br>corrupt the poor girl by being too near her. She was a murderer, she  
>couldn't let those kids be too near a murderer. True, Kenshin had also<br>killed before, and she couldn't help but imagine him with kids, but he was  
>somehow... different. She didn't want to talk to Kenshin about it, right<br>now- not in public, anyway- and she wouldn't feel comfortable around  
>children until she did... until she found out whatever it was that made him<br>so good despite the blood on his hands. The only person she thought she  
>might be able to talk to was Sanosuke, but he was avoiding her and Kenshin,<br>for some reason.  
><br>Kenshin met with everyone and judged their moods instantly. Kaoru was...  
>well, the same Kaoru she'd been since the incident had happened. Sanosuke<br>was too embarrassed to meet his face. Saitoh, in hiding until he left as  
>per their agreement, didn't know what he'd gotten himself into. Yahiko was<br>delighted- and a little nervous- at being left on his

own to fend for  
>himself, for once. Kenshin allowed himself a slight smile- the boy was a<br>very quick learner, and had a heart few could match. He'd do fine-  
>especially with everyone helping him. Megumi was looking a little...<br>angry. Not at him and Kaoru (though it was obvious she was annoyed that  
>Kaoru hadn't snapped out of it, yet), but more at Sanosuke. Kenshin didn't<br>even WANT to know what that was about. Dr. Genzai and the kids were having  
>fun, blissfully ignorant of the seriousness of the parting. Tsubame and<br>Tae were their usual selves- Tae was worrying over the food, and Tsubame  
>was nervous about the company, a little shy about Yahiko's presence, but<br>still happy to be around people who treated her as family. He saw Tae send  
>the young girl off on a quick task before returning to her serving. <br>Kenshin guessed why when he saw where Tsubame was going, and made a mental  
>note to bring back something nice for them- they deserved it. He also made<br>a mental note not to underestimate waitresses in the future.  
><br>Once all the food was served (and Saitoh learned also to never  
  
>underestimate a waitress when Tsubame showed up with a bowl full of<br>steaming hot Sukiyaki for his consumption), the party started in earnest.  
>Tsubame and Tae chatted politely with Yahiko, Ayame and Suzame ate settled<br>down and proceeded to something they thought was very important- eating.  
>Dr. Genzai was chatting politely with Megumi. Sanosuke was still sulking,<br>and Kaoru and Kenshin were hardly a couple of chatterboxes, but everyone  
>sensed their mood and, instead of letting it get them down, tried instead<br>to cheer them up by being cheerful on their own.  
  
><br>All too quickly, however, they ran out of food and the goodbyes had to be  
>said. The first people to go were Dr. Genzai and his two young charges,<br>since they needed to go to bed early.  
><br>It wasn't until they had to go home that Ayame and Suzame realized they  
>weren't going to be seeing Kenshin or Kaoru for quite some time. They<br>reacted... predictably.  
><br>"Ken-ni! Don't go!" Ayame cried, clamping on to his leg.  
  
><br>"Pwease? We want you to stay here, with us! Pwease stay?" Suzame sobbed,  
>clamping on to a leg as well- thought the leg she grabbed belonged to<br>Kaoru.  
><br>Kaoru felt like the physical contact stung. She had to go now, more than  
>ever, to keep from corrupting these little darlings with her presence. <br>However, she couldn't get away as long as Suzame clung to her like that.  
>She couldn't do anything to get the young girl to let her go- that would<br>just mean touching her with her blood stained hands all the more, and she  
>couldn't do that. Desperate for a rescue, she looked to Kenshin, who was<br>having his own problems in the removing-little-kids

predicament. Ayame was  
>holding him too tight for him to pry her off without hurting  
her.<br>  
>Thankfully, Dr. Genzai came to their rescue. "Now, kids," he said.  
<br>"Kenshin and Kaoru are going away on a very important trip. They  
may not  
>be back for a long time, but if you don't let go then they aren't  
going to<br>be able to get started on their journey, which would mean  
they'd NEVER be  
>able to come back."<br>  
>Despite the flawed logic of the statement, that caught the two  
little<br>girls' attention. Tears in their eyes, they released the  
two adults and  
>joined Dr. Genzai.<br>  
>"Bye Ken-ni! Bye, Kaowu-neesan. We love you!"<br>  
>Kenshin, sensing Kaoru's discomfort, decided to answer for the both  
of<br>them. "Don't worry, you two- we'll be back before you know it.  
And when  
>we get back, we'll hold an even bigger party in honor of our  
return."<br>  
>That gave the girls two really big smiles. "Pwomise?<br>  
>Kenshin smiled back and nodded. "Promise."<br>  
>The next to go was Tae, with the similar excuse of taking Tsubame  
home. <br>She approached Kaoru, her arms outstretched, and took her  
into a gentle  
>hug. "You be careful now, okay?" Tae said. "Quit blaming yourself  
for<br>something you had no control over... and," here her voice  
descended into a  
>whisper, "Try to remember not to do anything I wouldn't do... at  
least, not<br>until the two of you get married, okay?"  
><br>If Kaoru had felt up to blushing, she would have. However, the  
sympathetic  
>hug Tae was giving her helped relieve some of the dark cloud hanging  
over<br>her shoulder, and so the embarrassment that she would have  
usually felt was  
>absorbed by other emotions.<br>  
>After disengaging herself from Kaoru, Tae turned and hugged Kenshin,  
as<br>well- much to his and Kaoru's surprise. "Bring her back safe,  
okay?" Tae  
>said, loud enough for everyone to hear. Letting her voice fall into  
a<br>whisper again, she added, "You might want to look for a ring  
while you're  
>out there, okay?"<br>  
>Kenshin looked a little abashed, but when Tae backed off he gave her  
a<br>short- and very quick- nod. Tae was taken a little aback- she  
was just  
>joking, but he seemed to take her seriously... which was definitely  
a good<br>thing. Tae turned to go, and Tsubame followed.

><br>"Tsubame?" Kenshin called, stopping her before she got too far.

><br>"Yes, Kenshin-san?" she asked, turning to see him.  
><br>"Keep Yahiko-chan out of trouble while we're gone," he  
instructed, grinning  
>slightly.<br>  
>"Hey!" came a voice from the other side of the room. "I'm NOT a  
chan, got<br>it!?"  
><br>Blushing, Tsubame nodded. "I will, Kenshin-san." Turning back to  
follow  
>Tae, she nearly stumbled over her own clothing before rushing up to

the<br>Akebeko's matriarch.

><br>Sanosuke had tried to slip out while Kenshin and Kaoru were distracted by

>the others' leaving, but Megumi had grabbed him before he could leave. She<br>was going to make SURE she could talk to him about all this, and the only

>way she could make certain she had that opportunity was to keep him in<br>sight until she had that discussion.

><br>However, it WAS getting late, and she would probably have a long day coming

>up, and they definitely would, so she should probably leave soon, as well. <br>And take that troublesome drunk, Sano, with her.

><br>"Come on, let's get out of here," she said to Sano, standing up and

>dragging him along by the collar of his gi. He nearly tore out of her<br>grasp when she came up to Kaoru and Kenshin.

><br>"Bye, you two... We'll see you when we get back. Try not to get in too

>much trouble- I don't want to have to work too hard when you return," she<br>winked.

><br>"Bye, Megumi-dono," Kenshin said. Kaoru nearly nodded.

><br>Sano said nothing, trying to hang off in the background. Megumi prompted

>him with a slap to the back of the head.<br>

>"Um, yeah, bye," he muttered.<br>

>Megumi looked at him in frustration before grabbing his arm and dragging<br>him off.

><br>Kenshin chuckled a little watching them head off. He knew Sano was a

>little embarrassed about missing the fight, and that was why he was avoiding<br>them, but it seemed like Megumi would straighten him out quickly enough.

>He, however, would have a much harder time straightening Kaoru out. With<br>everyone gone who was going to go, his attention returned to the problem of

>helping her deal with having killed a man. He wasn't entirely sure if what<br>he had planned for her would work- after all, it had been several years

>since he last killed a man, and he still wasn't entirely over it. Then<br>again, he'd killed many, MANY more men than just one.

><br>Yahiko approached the two of them, yawning. "Well, I'm going to bed.

>G'night, you two. See you in the morning."<br>

>Kenshin sighed. "Actually, Yahiko, I don't think you will."<br>

>Yahiko looked stunned. "You mean... you're leaving tonight?"<br>

>"No," Kenshin replied, shaking his head. "But we're going to be leaving<br>very early tomorrow. Before dawn. You won't be awake by then."

><br>"Then maybe I should stay up a little later," Yahiko said. "I was hoping

>to have a chance to talk with you two about some things before you leave."<br>

>Kenshin smiled. "Go on to bed. Megumi and Tae will be around to help you<br>out with anything you might have questions with."

><br>"But... then I-"  
><br>"Yahiko," Kenshin said. "I know you just don't want to say  
goodbye. Well,  
>don't worry- as we told Ayame and Suzame, we'll be back before you  
know<br>it."  
><br>Yahiko wasn't buying it. "And how long will that be? Months?  
YEARS? How  
>will I get in touch with you if I need to you?"<br>  
>Kenshin sighed. "Yahiko... I wasn't planning on this, but you do  
make a<br>good point. Regardless of whether we're ready or not, we'll  
be back- at  
>least for a short time- in six months. Okay?" Yahiko didn't move.  
<br>Kenshin offered a hand to shake. "Okay?"  
><br>Yahiko hesitated, then grabbed the hand... and pulled himself  
into a big  
>hug with Kenshin. "I'm going to miss you two," he said.<br>

>Kenshin returned the hug, smiling. Usually, Yahiko would be  
struggling to<br>get out of one, not giving someone else one. "And  
we're going to miss  
>you."<br>  
>Yahiko broke her hug off from Kenshin and went over to Kaoru. "You  
get<br>better FAST, okay?"  
><br>Kaoru couldn't help but smile, even though she couldn't see  
herself getting  
>better EVER. "Goodbye, Yahiko," she said, taking him into a hug.  
"As<br>Kenshin said, we'll visit."  
><br>"I'm not going to give up my training, you know," Yahiko noted.  
"I'll  
>practice every day, just how you told me to. We can pick up right  
where<br>you left off when you get back."  
><br>Kaoru stiffened at the mention of training. She couldn't teach  
anyone any  
>more- she'd disgraced her art. But now was not the time to say that,  
so<br>she just kept silent.  
><br>Once she released him, Kenshin knelt down to ruffle Yahiko's  
hair. "You go  
>on to bed now, okay?"<br>  
>Yahiko nodded. "Okay, Kenshin... Good bye."<br>  
>After he left, Kenshin turned to Kaoru. "Why don't you go to bed, as  
well?<br> I've got some last-minute things to pack still, but you  
should get your  
>rest. It's going to be a long day for you, tomorrow."<br>  
>Kaoru nodded, and went off to her bed. Once she was out of sight,  
Kenshin<br>walked over to where Saitoh was still standing.  
><br>"I hate you, you know," Saitoh said.  
><br>"I'm sorry for forcing you into this, Saitoh. But there was  
no-one else I  
>knew of who could do this job."<br>  
>Saitoh shook his head. "Tokio is going to kill me- this is going to  
take<br>away a lot of our little time together... and a large amount  
of our money."  
><br>Kenshin nodded. "It may. It might not, you know, if you do it  
right."  
><br>"Well, I made an agreement. I don't have a choice, now, do I?"

><br>Kenshin smiled. "Excuse me, I have to pack up a few things  
before I leave  
>tomorrow."<br>  
>Saitoh merely nodded. "You're going to take her to see it, aren't

you?"<br>  
>Kenshin shook his head. "Perhaps. We shall see."<br>

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### 3. Chapter 3

#### Chapter 3

><br>"Wake up, boy."  
><br>Yahiko snored and turned over, ignoring the throaty voice.  
  
><br>"Last chance, kid. Wake up, or else."  
><br>Yahiko slept on, oblivious to any danger.  
><br>"Oh, well, kid. I warned you."  
><br>Suddenly, the blankets were torn off of the sleeping boy, rolled  
up, and  
>tossed into his face.<br>  
>"Huh, what!?" Yahiko snorted, tearing at the bundle of cloth to get  
it off.<br> Once he succeeded, he opened his eyes and stared up at  
the person standing  
>over him in surprise. "Saitoh!"<br>  
>"Get up, boy, and meet me downstairs in ten minutes for  
training."<br>  
>"Training?" Yahiko said, still too sleepy to understand what was  
going on.<br>  
>"You heard me- with the sensei of this dojo unavailable, my services  
as<br>your instructor are required. And I don't tolerate laziness, so  
you've got  
>ten minutes to get dressed and ready for training. If you're not  
ready in<br>that time, I'll have some disciplinary exercises for for.  
Now get up."  
><br>With that, Saitoh turned and left.  
><br>Yahiko blinked. What in the hell was Saitoh up to?  
><br>\* \* \* \* \*  
><br>"Kenshin?" Kaoru finally asked. She didn't want to talk to him  
any more  
>than she had to- she no longer felt as if she deserved him, which  
made<br>talking to him painful- but her curiosity was overwhelming  
her.  
><br>"Yes, Kaoru?" he said, still not using the 'dono.' They had just  
made it  
>out of the city, and were now walking down one of the main roads out  
of<br>Tokyo.  
><br>"Where are we going?"  
><br>"Well, we'll start with a trip to Kyoto. There's... something I  
want to  
>show you there," Kenshin said hesitantly. "After that, well... we'll  
see. <br>We won't stay in Kyoto very long, however- I don't want to

be recognized."

>He paused. "Misao and our friends will probably know I'm there, but we  
>won't be meeting with them unless they seek us out."

><br>Kaoru nodded. Her curiosity sated, she went quiet again,  
continuing to

>follow him at a distance. Suddenly, he put his hand to the hilt of  
his<br>sword and darted to the side of the road.

><br>"Kenshin?!" she cried out in surprise.

><br>"Relax!" He emerged from the bushes. "I saw movement and  
couldn't quite

>tell what it was at first- it turned out to just be a squirrel  
running<br>through the trees. We can't take any chances- I've heard  
that there have

>been a number of murders and robberies along this road, and I don't  
want to<br>be surprised by them."

><br>Kaoru relaxed, and resumed her silent mood. Kenshin sighed.

><br>"For a second there, Kaoru," he said plaintively. "I thought I  
almost saw

>the old you- when you were startled and let your guard down, you  
looked<br>alive again." He sighed again, staring deeply into her  
eyes. "Why did you

>change?"<br>

>Kaoru looked back at him, and was startled at so what she saw. In  
his<br>eyes, neither the amber of the Rurouni nor the violet of the  
Battousai were

>dominant. Instead, it almost looked like his eyes were shining  
with<br>alternate amber and violet stripes arranged in a circle. It  
was as if both

>forms of himself were asking the question.<br>

>And she didn't have an answer for him. Not one that she felt either  
side<br>of him would accept, at any rate. Just saying that she didn't  
feel

>'worthy' of being what she once was didn't seem to be enough. After  
a few<br>moments, she closed her own eyes so that she wouldn't have  
to look at him.

>To her surprise, a small tear was squeezed out by that action. She  
started<br>to shake her head to let him know he couldn't answer her,  
but before she

>could complete even the first motion she felt his hands on her  
cheek,<br>wiping the tear away. She opened her eyes to see him  
looking at her

>fiercely, and her eyes watered even more. She just couldn't stand to  
see<br>him looking at her any more- she felt so dirty, so unworthy of  
him... so

>much like a filthy murderer.<br>

>Kenshin couldn't stand to see her like that. He wanted to grab his  
sword,<br>turn it around, find whatever enemy it was who was making  
Kaoru cry, and

>turn them into a shishkabob... but he knew that there was no enemy  
who he<br>could fight to help her. No amount of swordfighting would  
end her

>suffering.<br>

>Just trying to stop her tears, he grabbed her and wrapped her up in  
his<br>arms. She attempted to struggle out of them briefly, but he  
refused to let

>go of his fierce embrace. Slowly, she stopped fighting him and  
started<br>crying on his shoulder. She so wanted to do this before,  
but now it felt

>so wrong to be comforted by him, and that only made her want to cry harder.<br> Soon, she was sobbing, not able to control herself any more. All that  
>Kenshin did was tighten the hug, which made her want to escape even more-<br>to not further stain his hands with her touch. He just wouldn't let go,  
>however, and so there was little she could do but continue to sob.<br>  
>Kenshin's heart ached. All he wanted to do was keep her from crying, and<br>all she was doing was crying even more. He just didn't know what to do.  
><br>'It looks,' he thought, adjusting his hands to allow himself to pat her on  
>the back, 'Like I'll have to come up with something to do for her before we<br>get to Kyoto. I just wish I could think of what.'

><br>\* \* \* \* \*

><br>Yahiko was grumbling under his breath as he continued his exercises. So  
>far, Saitoh hadn't instructed him in anything he couldn't have done on his<br>own- just told him to 'perform a thousand repetitions of each of the basic  
>motions.' No new katas, no special moves, no sparring, nothing.  
<br>Furthermore, the policeman had yet to explain WHY he was 'training' Yahiko,  
>and wouldn't allow him any time to ask questions.<br>  
>"997... 998... 999... 1000! Done!" Yahiko cried as he completed his<br>practice. He turned to face Saitoh and raised his eyes arrogantly to meet  
>the other man's. "Okay, I've finished my repetitions. Now will you tell me<br>why you decided to train me all of a sudden? Or at least actually start  
>TRAINING me, instead of just telling me to do what I was planning to do,<br>anyway!"  
><br>Saitoh grunted noncommittally. He had to admit, the boy did know his  
>basics. He couldn't really judge him on kata, either, since he wasn't<br>exactly familiar with the Kamiya school's variances. Sparring would be,  
>well... useless, at that point. Yahiko was starting to learn a few pretty<br>good moves- some of them just by watching others fight- but he was still  
>nowhere NEAR Saitoh's level. The boy was just at that awkward stage where<br>he was good enough that Saitoh wouldn't be able to limit himself in a  
>sparring competition and still be effective, but not good enough to present<br>even the slightest of challenges. And as far as special moves went...  
>well, Saitoh wasn't about to teach the Gatotsu to a mere child. <br>  
>"Hey, are you listening to me?!" Yahiko growled.<br>  
>"Shut up, brat. The Battousai told me to train you... I'm just trying to<br>figure out what I CAN teach you."  
><br>"How about fixing my Gatotsu?" Yahiko asked. "I've been working on  
>developing one from what I've seen of you using it, but I'm not sure I've<br>got it right, yet."  
><br>Saitoh raised an eyebrow. "You've been developing your own version of the  
>Gatotsu based on what you've seen of me?" He sniffed arrogantly. "I



doubt  
>you got it right at all. Probably just some pathetically weak attack that

>wouldn't work in a real fight."<br>

>Yahiko was starting to get frustrated with the conceited way Saitoh was  
>downplaying his abilities. "Then why don't you try me?" he said, getting

>down into his version of the Gatotsu stance.<br>

>Saitoh snorted. From what he could see, a simple block would disarm the  
>boy if he were to try and attack from that stance. "I can see problems

>already- you aren't holding the sword properly, for one thing."<br>

>Yahiko nodded. "Yeah, it's not exactly like yours- I had to modify it to  
>fit me, but it works. There may be some things you can help me fix, but it

>works."<br>

>"Yeah, whatever. If you were to attack me with it, you'd do nothing more  
>than embarrass yourself."

><br>Yahiko glared at him. "Like I said- try me."

><br>Saitoh rolled his eyes. "That rooster-head's been too strong an influence

>on you- he insisted on fighting me, as well, and I had to beat him up  
>because of it. I won't do that to a kid."

><br>"Then you'll just LET me attack you?"

><br>"Look, Kenshin made me swear to make certain you kept up your training and

>that you were well protected if any of his enemies showed up and tried to  
>harm you to get to him. I don't think fending off your attacks were part

>of the bargain, though."<br>

>"This is part of the training- you said yourself you were having trouble  
>thinking of what to do. So let's spar!"

><br>Saitoh finally gave up, sighing. "Fine- one pass where you can try that

>silly caricature of the Gatotsu on me. But don't start crying when I show  
>you how pathetic an imitation it is."

><br>Yahiko nodded, focusing his attention on his stance. "One pass. Got it."

><br>Saitoh picked out a shinai to match Yahiko with, not wanting to be told he

>had an 'unfair advantage' for using his katana against the much lighter  
>bamboo sword the boy wielded. He got down into a defensive stance, and

>waited. "Ready," he said.<br>

>Yahiko didn't waste time. He charged in, striking just as he got in sword  
>range. Saitoh casually blocked the blow...

><br>Or at least he THOUGHT he'd blocked it. His eyes widened as the sword he

>was using to block with was easily cut through and the Gatotsu wasn't even  
>slightly deflected. The blow struck hard, knocking him half-way across the

>dojo and onto the floor.<br>

>"Oof!" Saitoh coughed. He felt that his ribs were cracked by the blow- if  
>it had been a real sword, he would be very dead... or if the blow had been

>delivered slightly stronger. "Okay... maybe you were able to get it right,  
>after all," he admitted, stunned. Determined not to show any weakness,

>however, he stood up and ignored the pain in his ribs, trying to figure out  
>how the boy's technique had been able to fool him. "Set

up some practice  
>dummies. I want to see you do that again, this time from a  
different<br>direction. Actually, set up enough practice dummies so  
you can demonstrate  
>all of your special techniques- I'm interested in seeing how far  
you've<br>really gotten in your studies."  
><br>He looked at the damaged shinai he was holding. It appeared to  
have been  
>split as if a saw had ripped through it. He wasn't certain, but he  
felt<br>that if he'd touched the edge of Yahiko's shinai during the  
Gatotsu, he'd  
>no longer have that part of the body.<br>  
>In fact, he was surprised he was still alive. Yahiko must have  
pulled the<br>blow... though he certainly hadn't pulled it much.  
Someone would have to  
>teach him better control, and soon, or else the boy would wind up  
killing<br>someone without intending to.  
><br>Well, there were some options. Mentally, he started to make a  
list. He  
>had some things to work out, and some people to talk to. This was  
going to<br>get difficult... he knew he shouldn't have made that  
promise to Kenshin.  
><br>\* \* \* \* \*  
><br>Sanosuke blinked his eyes open to see a pair of cute,  
five-year-old faces  
>peering at him intently. As he watched, their faces brightened up  
and the<br>two children ran off out of his range of vision.

><br>"Megumi-saaan!" Ayame and Suzame called out simultaneously.  
"He's awake!  
>He's awake, Megumi-san!"<br>  
>Sanosuke sat up, shaking his head to clear the cobwebs out of it.  
Why was<br>he at the clinic, again? He certainly didn't remember  
having done anything  
>which would require medical treatment....<br>  
>Oh, right. Megumi had wanted to 'talk,' and didn't want him going  
home<br>until they had. Why he bothered to listen to her, he didn't  
know, but  
>somehow he found himself spending the night on one of the spare beds  
in her<br>and Dr. Genzai's clinic. Apparently, Megumi had left an  
alarm system to  
>let her know when he awoke, and that alarm system was doing  
everything they<br>could to let her know it had worked.

><br>Breaking her way into his musings, the female doctor entered the  
room,  
>following the enthusiastic girls. Each of the children were carrying  
a<br>bundle, as was Megumi, and as soon as they set their loads down  
they  
>scampered out of the room. "Well, I see you've finally decided to  
arise<br>from the dead, today," she commented cheekily.  
><br>"I won't feel much like talking until after I've eaten and  
changed,  
>Fox-lady," Sanosuke snapped back.<br>  
>Megumi nodded, unphased. "Of course. Here's a change of clothes,  
and<br>Ayame and Suzame brought in your breakfast and tea. I'll be  
waiting in my  
>office when you're ready."<br>  
>Sanosuke glared at her suspiciously. "Why the guards if you aren't  
going<br>to begin your interrogation immediately?"

><br>Megumi scoffed at that. "Interrogation? Who said anything about an  
>interrogation? I just wanted to know why you were doing everything  
you<br>could to make Kaoru's departure even more difficult on her,  
yesterday!"  
><br>The one-time gangster went ashen. "That was NOT what I was  
trying to do,"  
>he mumbled fiercely.<br>  
>Megumi looked at him intently, examining his expression. Finally  
she<br>snorted in exasperation. "Not you, too!"  
><br>"What?!" he replied, bewildered by her outburst.  
><br>She sighed. "Look, Sanosuke... I don't know WHY in the world you  
feel  
>guilty over this, but drop it. The only person who is to blame is  
the guy<br>who died- he's the one who attacked Kenshin, after all."

><br>Sanosuke grimaced. "I'm not exactly guilty over that... it's  
just... well,  
>I shouldn't have been out drinking and gambling! Not while I knew  
Kenshin<br>wasn't himself- he'd just gotten back from that last  
conflict, and what did  
>I do? Leave him, unprotected, just so I could indulge in a little  
fun."<br>  
>"Sounds like guilt to me," Megumi said, amused. "Though if it keeps  
you<br>from drinking and gambling, maybe a little guilt is a good  
thing. But  
>don't use that guilt as an excuse to stay away from your friends  
when they<br>needs you- instead, think of it as a learning  
experience. Kaoru thought  
>you were... shunning her... for having killed that man, for gods'  
sake!"<br>  
>He winced. "That was... not what I meant to do."<br>  
>"You said that already."<br>  
>"Look, Fox-lady, don't try me," Sanosuke warned. "I'll make it up to  
her<br>when she gets back. Now, can I go?"  
><br>Megumi shook her head. "Oh, no. See, since Kenshin and Kaoru  
have both  
>left, I think we need to add on to your responsibilities a bit.  
Starting<br>with helping Yahiko keep the dojo in business...."

><br>-----  
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